

THE WASHINGTON POST
31 OCT 1969

Sen Design

Hill Told of U.S. Laos Role, State Insists

By Murrey Marder

Washington Post Staff Writer

A State Department spokesman bobbed and weaved through a sea of questions yesterday, insisting that all "appropriate members of the Congress" were "aware" of U.S. "operations in Laos."

Neither the "appropriate" congressmen nor the nature of the Laotian "operations" were identified, except in newsmen's inquiries.

State Department press officer Robert J. McCloskey faced questions raised by the unchallenged disclosure that the United States, through the Central Intelligence Agency, has secretly armed, trained and supplied an army of 36,000 Meo tribesmen in Laos to fight Communist forces.

McCloskey's references to "appropriate members" of Congress was obviously an allusion, in part, to the few members regularly briefed on CIA activities. But no U.S. official yet has openly admitted the CIA operation.

Rogers Disputed

Secretary of State William P. Rogers and Sen. J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, disagreed Wednesday on whether Congress ever was properly informed about covert U.S. activities in Laos.

Rogers said he understood Congress "was familiar with the developments in Laos." Fulbright told newsmen afterward, "You know how the CIA appropriation is handled. It's not handled in the regular way. There are things that are covered up."

Said spokesman McCloskey: "Officials of previous administrations, as well as of this administration, have discussed the U.S. role in Laos with

members of the Senate and the House since 1963. Also, members of the Congress visiting Laos have been briefed by our embassy in Vientiane during the same period.

'Useful Means'

"The secretary regards the hearings now being conducted by the Symington subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as a useful means to keep the Congress informed on our activities in Laos, and in other countries being covered in the subcommittee hearings.

"... Our primary concern in Laos is the preservation of the independence and neutrality of Laos, and the restoration of full implementation of the 1962 Geneva accords. All of our actions, including support of diplomatic moves, have been undertaken with that objective in mind and have been in response to requests of the neutralist government of Laos."

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, who has said he was aware of U.S. operations in Laos, added yesterday that when he was there in August, he was "concerned" and "disturbed about the heavy reinvolvement."

Sen. Clifford P. Case (R-N.J.) told newsmen the situation represents "a general confusion in the Executive Branch between those situations necessary to carry out covert operations and those needs requiring congressional support." Case added: "This is war, in my opinion, and Congress should be involved ... but ... it has been going on for several administrations."

Sen. John Sherman Cooper (R-Ky.) has said he plans further legislative action to bar funds for U.S. combat support of local forces in Laos and Thailand.

SENATE UNIT TO EXAMINE THAI POLICY

Seeks A Clarification Of Plans To Involve U.S. In Nation's Defense

By NATHAN MILLER

[Washington Bureau of The Sun]

Washington, Oct. 30 — A special Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee, having completed hearings on the American involvement in Laos, is turning its attention to the controversial commitment to Thailand.

The Thai hearings, which will get under way behind closed doors November 10, are expected to revive arguments between the committee and the administration over a U.S.-Thai military contingency plan.

Meanwhile, the State Department moved to rebuff challenges to the administration's role in Laos with a statement that since 1963 Congress had been briefed on the situation there and that members who were interested were aware of U.S. activities.

Rogers Is Bolstered

By this means, the department moved to bolster the position of William P. Rogers, Secretary of State, who yesterday had rejected charges that the government was acting without the knowledge of Congress in becoming involved in the anti-Communist fighting in Laos.

Senator J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, had challenged the constitutionality of the Laos involvement. He also has been demanding a copy of the agreement with Thailand, negotiated in 1964-1965, since last summer, without success.

Following the 3½-hour closed-door meeting with Mr. Rogers, the Arkansas Democrat said the Thai agreement provoked the most heated discussion. He said the secretary again had promised to do what he could to make the document available.

Efforts Are Continuing

Committee sources said efforts to obtain the copy were continuing, and it would figure in the upcoming hearings, which are expected to last the better part of a week.

Senator Fulbright has contended that under the agreement, negotiated by the military, the U.S. commitment to Thailand goes beyond that offered under terms of the Southwest Asia Treaty Organization pact and could become a back door to war.

Both the administration and Thais have denied this.

The Pentagon has control of the agreement. Melvin R. Laird, Secretary of Defense, has said he is "extremely reluctant" for it to get out of the Defense Department's hands.

Cites Discussions

Discussing Laos, Robert J. McCloskey, the State Department spokesman, said: "Officials of the previous administration as well as of this administration have discussed the U.S. role in Laos with members of the Senate and House since 1963.

"Also members of Congress visiting Laos have been briefed by the embassy in Vietnam at the same period," he added. "Those who were interested in Laos since 1963 had an opportunity to be briefed here or in Laos."

ROGERS DISPUTES FULBRIGHT ON LAOS

**Asserts Congress Receives
Full Information on U.S.
Role in Secret Warfare**

By RICHARD HALLORAN
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 29 —

Secretary of State William P. Rogers disputed Senator J. W. Fulbright today on his allegation that the State Department had not kept the Senate Foreign Relations Committee fully informed on American military operations in Laos.

Mr. Rogers told reporters after a closed committee hearing that he was surprised by the Senator's charge. "I thought Congress was familiar with what we are doing there," he said. "We thought Congress understood it."

Discussing the policy toward Laos, Mr. Rogers said he did not think that there was going to be a change now. Nixon Administration sources have said that a Foreign Relations subcommittee's inquiry into the Laotian issue had stimulated the Administration to begin rethinking policy on Laos.

Fundamental Issue Raised

Senator Fulbright, Democrat of Arkansas and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, insisted during the hearing that the Administration had not briefed him or the committee on the United States involvement in the clandestine war in Laos. He made similar remarks yesterday in public.

The dispute underscored a fundamental issue on the making of American foreign policy: Just what does the Constitution demand of the Executive branch in seeking the advice and consent of the Senate in the conduct of foreign affairs?

More and more has been heard on the matter as doubts about the United States' participation in the war in Vietnam

has grown. First the process by which the United States became enmeshed in Vietnam was questioned, and the questioning has spread to other foreign-policy matters.

Congressional sources said the major part of the hearing today was taken up with a recapitulation.

Mr. Rogers was also reported to have asked the committee not to press a resolution calling for a moratorium on the testing of multiple independent re-entry vehicles, a nuclear-armed missile known as MIRV. Mr. Fulbright said later that the committee would consider the request but that Mr. Rogers "didn't talk us out of it."

Opponents contend that it would withhold a bargaining instrument from the United States delegation when it meets representatives of the Soviet Union in Helsinki next month to begin preliminary discussions on restraining the strategic arms race.

The Secretary was reported to have told the committee that the United States would enter those negotiations with "no conditions at all" on what can be negotiated.

On the Laotian issue, Senator Fulbright said that he did not believe there was any authority for United States military aid to Laos.

"I don't think anyone in the Congress, with the possible exception of one or two members of the Appropriations Committee, knew anything about it," he added.

Rogers Cites Precedents

Mr. Rogers, who indicated that he doubted that the American actions in Laos were unconstitutional, contended that the Administration was following the policy set by the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.

An inquiry to the State Department for specifics about when Congress had been briefed on Laos was inconclusive. Officials said they were looking at the record to determine how information had been passed to the legislators.

Administration sources contended that Senators had been informed and pointed out that several members of Congress and staff men had visited Laos and been fully briefed at the embassy in Vientiane.

The sources also maintained that a number of Senators had been told what is going on but had not focused on the significance of the information. Just as with Vietnam, some maintained, the Senators were informed and then suddenly realized what the facts added up to.

Both Administration and Congressional sources agreed that the dispute was part of a continuing search by the Senate for a role in the making of foreign policy. An aide to Senator Fulbright said his contentions were a reflection of his feeling that the Senate's role had been subverted.

Congressional sources also noted that the Senators themselves were partly at fault for neglecting to assert themselves. Mr. Fulbright is reported to share the feeling.

30 OCT 1969

Rogers Admits Laos Arms Role

By Murrey Marder

Washington Post Staff Writer

Secretary of State William P. Rogers indirectly conceded yesterday that for years the United States has financed, armed and trained a clandestine army of 36,000 guerrillas in Laos.

In the first acknowledgement ever made on the public record, Rogers treated the U.S. involvement in the semi-secret war in Laos as a matter of common knowledge. But Rogers avoided explicitly stating precisely what he was acknowledging, and said there are no plans to stop or change present operations in Laos.

"I had thought that the Congress was familiar with the developments in Laos," Rogers said. "Certainly they are familiar with them now . . . I thought Congress understood it."

"This is really quite extraordinary," said Sen. J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.). Both were commenting after Rogers testified behind closed doors for three and a half hours before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which Fulbright heads.

"It is quite ordinary for a dictatorship," said Fulbright, "but to be conducting quite as large a war as this (in Laos) without authorization is quite unusual."

Fulbright said in an interview Tuesday that, through the Central Intelligence Agency, the United States, under three administrations, has been supplying, arming, training and transporting the clandestine Laotian army of Meo tribesman headed by Gen. Vang Pao.

The cost to the United States for military assistance to Laos, Fulbright said, is between \$50 and \$160 million this year. Other sources said yesterday that about half this amount is used to finance the Meo guerrilla force, and the rest goes to other military needs in Laos. But uncounted in the \$160 million total this year, these sources said, are the costs of U.S. bombing support from Thailand for operations in Laos.

Rogers, when newsmen put Fulbright's specific statements to him, said:

"Well, the operations in Laos, as you know, were started in the time of President Kennedy" and continued through the Johnson and Nixon administrations. When he was asked if they will be halted now, Rogers responded, "No, I don't think there is going to be a change in policy, not now."

There are no U.S. "ground forces in Laos," Rogers reiterated, but there are still "45,000 North Vietnamese forces in Laos." It continues to be the United States' hope, he said, that an end to the war in Vietnam will solve the problems of Communist penetrations into Laos and Cambodia as well.

Newsmen asked Rogers for comment on Fulbright's charge Tuesday that the extent of the U.S. involvement in Laos may be unconstitutional. "I doubt very much if it is unconstitutional," replied Rogers.

"What about the public's 'right to know?'" asked a reporter. Said Rogers, "Well, I think the public, if they have been reading the papers, know."

Fulbright, when told later that Rogers said he expects no change in U.S. policy in Laos, said: "I regret it, if that's what he said."

Hearings on Laos, which have been conducted in executive session by a subcommittee headed by Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.), show that the United States is "enormously over-committed" in Laos, Fulbright said, and "I don't think

there is any authority for it."

Symington declined to make any direct comment at this time on his Laos inquiry, except to say, "I've never known him (Fulbright) to make a misstatement in this field."

In Rogers' testimony yesterday, Fulbright said, "There was no effort whatever to deny what was in the papers" about U.S. clandestine operations in Laos, and Fulbright's comments on them.

The Symington subcommittee now has finished taking testimony on Laos. The question is how much of a struggle there will be between the subcommittee and the Nixon administration over making the testimony public. A major witness in the inquiry, on Tuesday, was CIA Director Richard Helms.

There is disagreement about the degree to which Congress has been aware of the clandestine U.S. operations in Laos in support of anti-Communist forces there. Senate Democratic leader Mike Mansfield (Mont.), a specialist on Southeast Asia, was quoted yesterday as saying that "I've really found nothing new in the

(Laos) hearings that I didn't know."

But Fulbright and other senators said they had no indication that covert U.S. activity in Laos was more than what Fulbright called "very minor, peripheral," apart from "the bombing of the Ho Chi-minh trails." With the present administration's contention that it thought Congress "understood" what was going on in Laos, pressure is now likely to mount for official disclosure of the details of the CIA-run operation there.